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PALESTINE REFUGEE PROBLEM

Arab Refugees

The problem is to develop a constructive program for the earliest possible return of approximately 700,000 Arab refugees to a normal mode of living in which they will resume self-dependence, to determine the costs of the program, and the best available sources of the funds required.

Current relief period. Of necessity the Relief Administration has been preoccupied solely to date with problems of delivering relief to the refugees. Every effort should now be made during the remaining period of direct relief administration to take the first steps toward the reduction of the numbers of the refugees through repatriation and resettlement. With respect to repatriation to Israel, efforts should be pressed concurrently with the negotiations on this subject between PCC and the Israeli authorities to determine the numbers and locations of those refugees desiring to return to Israel on a permanent basis or for a temporary period to settle property holdings with a view to permanent settlement elsewhere. If, as appears to be the case, the Israeli authorities prove for the moment reluctant to make commitments as to the numbers to be accepted in repatriation, inquiry might be made as to the numbers and skills of Arab refugees who might be employed either in the harvesting of crops or in the construction of new houses on a temporary basis in Israeli territory without prejudice to final decisions as to their repatriation. It might work out that some of the refugees employed on a temporary basis might remain permanently.

It is possible that a substantial number of Arab refugees may be repatriated during the coming summer months to areas which will eventually fall in any event under Arab jurisdiction as a result of the peace negotiations. Even if these areas are currently in Israeli possession, the efforts to repatriate this particular group of refugees should be pressed vigorously. The possibility of the early return of Arab civilians recently evacuated from the Faluja pocket at the time of the evacuation of the military should be explored. This situation suggests that there may be other areas to which those presently in the refugee state may be returned at an early date.

It is generally accepted that resettlement in Arab areas will provide the only solution for the majority of the refugees. Gradual assimilation and absorption of the refugees in Arab areas should therefore be initiated. The Arab states, with the possible exception of Trans-Jordan, now resist such absorption politically. The problem is posed therefore as to how the resistance which if maintained will prolong the problem and tend to isolate the refugee population as an unassimilable mass can be overcome. The first step in this direction would be to transfer the responsibility for camp management and direction to the extent possible consistent with the appropriate use of relief funds to the refugees. In this operation every effort should be made to make full use of such village or tribal organization as may exist among the refugee groups, or can be developed by the identification and location of accepted leaders among the refugees. Other steps looking toward the eventual acceptance by the Arab states of assimilation and absorption, such as the reduction of tensions in various ways presently

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